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Source: *Slavic Review*, Summer, 1991, Vol. 50, No. 2 (Summer, 1991), pp. 309-316

Published by: Cambridge University Press

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/2500206

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JUDITH DEUTSCH KORNBLATT

Gogol′ and the Muses of *Mirgorod*

The apparent preoccupation with nonliterary arts in *Mirgorod* suggests that Nikolai Gogol′, an uncannily successful experimenter-in-words, sought "comic prose equivalents for the effects of other media and genres." One narrator laments: "Gde voz′mu ia kistei i krasok, chtob izobrazit′ raznoobrazie s″ezda i velikolepnoe pirshestvo?" But paint obviously is not needed since the pen, misleadingly condemned as "vialo, mertvo," elicits an elaborate picture on its own.[1]

The overabundance of reference to other media in Gogol′'s texts, however, suggests more than a humorous contest between the arts. The rules of the competition itself, after all, would predetermine the outcome: a conniving writer dictates that the pen alone be present, and the absent arts (re)presented by a falsely modest, but in fact all-usurping, literary medium. This article will go beyond consideration of these formal, albeit intriguing, games by integrating meta-artistic statements with the author's implicit metaphysical conclusions. When Gogol′ makes explicit mention of the arts, in essay or story, he is nowhere as original as when he embeds into the core of his texts artistic effect—as heard in the case of music or seen in the case of painting and sculpture.

In the four stories of *Mirgorod,* Gogol′ systemically equates visual art with stasis on the one hand and music with vitality on the other. Beyond this romantic cliché, examined through the juxtaposition of literary styles, Gogol′ raises the possibility of infusing into our aesthetically and morally stagnant world the life-giving force of music, a phenomenon associated with a sphere grander, perhaps more divine, than our own. Yet he laments the more likely intrusion of the death-dealing power of silence into our world, ill-equipped as it is for the spontaneous and chaotic chords of musical joy.

Gogol′ moves imperceptibly from evocations of music to assertions about the power of disharmonious sound in general and, ultimately, links aurality to its terrifying opposite—silence—and the two in turn to *tot svet.* For Gogol′, that world beyond is the realm of both the supremely Good (be it aesthetic, moral, or spiritual) and the supremely Evil, a realm utterly other than the petty or, as Gogol′ would say, earthly world of many of his characters, and no doubt of his readers as well. Through his evocations of the arts, he creates a universe based not on the contrast of Heaven and Hell but, rather, on the uneven battle between the *poshlyi zemnoi* world of man and the awesome powers—good or evil—beyond.

Gogol′ mentions a variety of artistic media, but the three examined here—sculpture, painting, and music—are particularly important in light of the publication of his essay entitled "Skul′ptura, zhivopis′, i muzyka," included in the miscellany *Arabeski.* Gogol′ worked on the essay virtually simultaneously with the stories of *Mirgorod* and published both collections in 1835.[2] He probably borrowed the idea from an identically titled essay by D. V. Venevitinov,[3] and

1. Donald Fanger suggests this interest in other media in his analysis of "Povest′ o tom, kak possorilsia Ivan Ivanovich s Ivanom Nikiforovichem" in *The Creation of Nikolai Gogol* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1979), 104. The quotations from Gogol′ are found in N. V. Gogol′, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii,* 14 vols. (Moscow: Akademiia Nauk, 1937–1952) 2:264 and 2:271. Henceforth all references to Gogol′ will be from this edition and indicated in the text by volume and page number.

2. Gogol′ probably worked on the essay between February and September 1834, although he fabricated a composition date of 1831 for its final publication. Gogol′ no doubt intended to convince his readers that "Skul′ptura, zhivopis′, i muzyka" predated the other essays in *Arabeski* and could stand as a theoretical frontispiece to the collection.

3. Venevitinov's "Skul′ptura, zhivopis′, i muzyka" was first printed in *Severenaia lira* in 1827. It is

Slavic Review 50, no. 2 (Summer 1991)

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his hierarchy of the arts (with music at the apex) was a commonplace of romantic aesthetics of the time.[4] The ways in which Gogol′ plays on the borrowed terms, however, suggest the expansion of this derivative poetics into a supra-aesthetic ideal of his own.

Venevitinov deifies sculpture, painting, and music in his essay, and employs a typical romantic juxtaposition of inherently imperfect earth with sublime heaven, home of the sister-arts.[5] A narrator introduces each goddess to describe her role on earth, leading up to the third, whose sigh echoes in the universe as music. Music, according to Venevitinov, produces tears of a quiet delight that remind mortals of her presence. No such gentle persuasion for Gogol′, however. His all-powerful prose narrator, preempting ethereal music's self-definition, declaims (8:11–12):

> Но сильнее шипи, третий покал мой! Ярче сверкай и брызгай по золотым краям его, звонкая пена, — ты сверкаешь в честь музыки. Она восторженнее, она стремительнее обеих сестер своих. Она вся — порыв; она вдруг за одним разом отрывает человека от земли его, оглушает его громом могущих звуков и разом погружает его в свой мир. Она властительно ударяет, как по клавишам, по его нервам, по всему его существованию и обращает его в один трепет. Он уже не наслаждается [as he did in the contemplation of sculpture, JDK], он не сострадает [as he did with painting, JDK], он сам превращается в страдание; душа его не созерцает непостижимого явления, но сама живет, живет своею жизнию, живет порывно, сокрушительно, мятежно.

The physical power implied in this passage is obvious. Music, personified as a woman to whom a goblet of foaming wine is raised, tears, strikes, shatters, and gushes. All the more astounding, considering her gender, is her strength. Gogol′ is not alone in his personification of music—or all the arts—as female. Her physical strength, as opposed to her otherworldly beauty, however, sets this muse apart from more typical images of the period.[6] Her effect on the male

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included in D. V. Venevitinov, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (Moscow: Academia, 1934), 127–130. V. V. Gippius mentions the borrowing from Venevitinov in *Gogol,* trans. Robert A. Maguire (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Ardis, 1981), 42–43. Venevitinov, of course, himself borrowed the idea from European romantic theory.

4. Most of Russian romantic aesthetic theory derives directly from Friedrich Schelling, largely through the propogation of the German philosopher's ideas by several popular philosophy teachers in St. Petersburg and Moscow in the 1820s and 1830s. The Kruzhok liubomudrov, the journal *Moskovskii vestnik,* and the Slavophiles in general refined Schelling's philosophy for the Russian context, seeing in it native, largely religious, concepts and proof of Russian national originality. See Wsewolod Setschkareff, *Schellings Einfluss in der russischen Literature der 20er und 30er Jahre des XIX. Jahrhunderts* (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1939), chaps. 1 and 2. Gogol′ apparently had a Schellingian devotee as a teacher in his school in Nezhin, and himself imbibed much of romantic philosophy. In "Gogol's Definition of Romanticism," *Studies in Romanticism* 4 (Winter 1967), 120–127, Carl Proffer discusses explicit references to romanticism in Gogol′ but finds himself unable to prove much more than Gogol′'s frequent self-contradictions.

5. See, for example, N. I. Nadezhdin's article in *Teleskop,* in which, strongly influenced by Schelling, the critic discusses the "neobkhodimost′, znachenie i sila esteticheskogo obrazovaniia." Nadezhdin claims that only art can bridge the two opposing worlds of heaven and earth and concludes his essay with a quotation from Psalm 15:11, in the Slavonic version of the Bible: "Krasota v desnitse Tvoei v konets." N. I. Nadezhdin, "Neobkhodimost′, znachenie i sila esteticheskogo obrazovaniia," *Teleskop* 8, 10 (1831), 154, as cited in Setschkareff, *Schellings Einfluss,* 29.

6. This musical female also differs from the typical woman in Gogol′'s prose, where she is most commonly domineering and emasculating, or on occasion ephemeral and unapproachable; see the essay "Zhenshchina" (8:143–147), or the description of the governor's daughter in *Mertvye dushi* (6:90, 166), as well as the description of the woman with whom Gogol′ had supposedly fallen in love before his abrupt departure for Germany in 1829. (He describes [most critics say "invents"] her in a letter to his mother on 24 July 1829 [10:147–148].) The misunderstanding or even fear of women these depictions suggest makes Gogol′'s ascription of ideal music to the female realm, at the same time as he asserts that her power is creative instead of debilitating, all the more striking. The tension derived from a combination of the typical romantic image of feminine art and the normally masculine aggressive ideal found in Gogol′, however, is material for another study. For discussions of sexuality and gender in Gogol′, see Simon Karlinsky, *The*

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listener is even more important; he too begins to shatter and rebel or, as the above passage asserts, to live.

Jesse Zeldin suggests that Gogol''s aesthetic theory centers on the ideal of harmony, and he cites the story "Portret," the first version of which was also published in *Arabeski,* where we are told that "khudozhnik i v trevoge dyshit pokoem" (3:136).[7] Although much of Zeldin's argument is convincing, it does not explain the transforming power of music precisely through its agitating violence. The calm and unidimensionality implied by harmony have little to do with the multiple voices—the multiple chords and even disharmony—envisioned by Gogol'. His aesthetic view proclaims as the ideal a paradoxically violent power.[8]

The three arts, with powerful music crowning the hierarchy, manifest themselves in the *Mirgorod* collection in one of three related ways: a first-person narrator who, as already suggested, "humbly" bows to masters of the first two arts, usually to painters; direct reference to statues, paintings, or singing in the world of the characters; and, less explicitly, a narrator, identified or not, who actively sees and hears, and, as a result, describes through either visual or musical metaphors. At this stage of integration of the nonverbal arts Gogol' begins to move from specifically artistic references to music to a metaphysics of sound in general. Thus, when the narrator hears a palpable, and terrifying, silence, the connection of aural art to the world beyond the visible earthly world of the characters becomes clear.

Music appears in the first story of *Mirgorod,* "Starosvetskie pomeshchiki," in the wake of her two sisters. The narrator immediately admits to being most interested in the visual arts. He describes the paintings on the wall and claims that if he were a painter he could do justice to the portrait of the couple, whose "legkie morshchiny na ikh litsakh byli raspolozheny s takoiu priiatnostiiu, chto khudozhnik, verno by, ukral ikh" (2:15). The narrator's modesty is too precious, however. Literature, in fact, usurps painting's role. "Esli by ia byl zhivopisets," he laments immediately before the previous quotation, but he is not. He is a master of the prose medium and does justice to the scene quite well. This narrator is at once a self-deprecating and self-aggrandizing sentimentalist.[9] In fact, if in the first few pages he were to repeat the sentimental clichés

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Sexual Labyrinth of Nikolai Gogol (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976); James Woodward, *The Symbolic Art of Gogol: Essays on His Short Fiction* (Columbus, Ohio: Slavica, 1982); Hugh McLean, "Gogol's Retreat from Love: Towards an Interpretation of Mirgorod," *American Contributions to the Fourth International Congress of Slavists* (The Hague: Mouton, 1958), 225–244; Gary Cox, "Geographic, Sociological, and Sexual Tensions in Gogol's Dikan'ka Stories," *Slavic and East European Journal* 24 (1980): 219–232; and Gail Bonnett, "Deity to Demon: Gogol's Female Characters," *Proceedings. Pacific Northwest Conference on Foreign Languages, XXIIIrd Annual Meeting. April, 1972,* ed. Walter C. Kraft (Corvallis: Oregon State University, 1972), 253–267.

7. Jesse Zeldin, *Nikolai Gogol's Quest for Beauty: An Exploration into his Works* (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1978), 36.

8. Confirmation of the relation of aggressive power and the ideal can be sought in the other *Arabeski* essays, where Gogol' praises Aleksandr Pushkin as a musician-singer, whose "slog ego molniia; on tak zhe bleshchet, kak sverkaiushchie sabli, i letit bystree samoi bitvy" (8:51). Enormity and terror-invoking strength are features of the architecture he praises, of the historical periods and the geography that fascinate him. The two pieces concerning Cossacks, "O Malorossiiskikh pesniakh" and "Vzgliad na sostavlenie Malorossii," further elaborate a vocabulary of violence and majesty, and lead us to the Cossack fiction in *Mirgorod.* The second article condemns the pre-Cossack Ukraine for its monotony and passionless nature, then praises the Cossacks for their militant and multifaceted strength. The article on song explicitly concerns the Cossacks' passionate music that expresses a life that is "deiatel'na, raznoobrazna, svoevol'na, ispolnena vsego poeticheskogo" and where is apparent "sila, radost', mogushchestvo" (8:90, 91). Rightly or wrongly, Gogol' praises Cossack song for he believes that it "sochiniaetsia ne s perom v ruke, ne na bumage, ne s strogim raschetom, no v vikhre, v zabvenii, kogda dusha zvuchit i vse chleny, razrushaia ravnodushnoe, obyknovennoe polozhenie, stanoviatsia svobodnee" (8:95).

9. In "Skul'ptura, zhivopis', i muzyka," Gogol' associates each of the three arts with classicism, Christianity, and contemporary romanticism respectively. When he translates this hierarchy into prose fiction, he associates the middle term, painting, with an outdated sentimentalism of the eighteenth century instead of with the Christianity of a few centuries earlier.

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"pleasant" and "pleasing" a few more times, the story might never rise out of the honeyed pot of tender emotions or move beyond the saccharine plucking of heart strings.

The narrator quickly changes from one who sees to one who hears and abandons his false sentimentality for a more ironic stance. Tuning in with his ears, he directs his attention to the curious singing doors in the old couple's house. Each door has its own pitch, from thinnest treble to hoarse bass to a strangely jarring and at once moaning sound, and together they set up a cacophony of multivoiced disharmony or discordant concert (2:18). On the following page the narrator characterizes the buzzing of insects against the window of the house in a similar way—deep bass to shrill wail—and one page further he describes for us the odd concert that arises from Pul′kheria Ivanovna's carriage: "vozdukh napolnialsia strannymi zvukami, tak chto vdrug byli slyshny i fleita, i bubny, i baraban" (2:20).

The sounds the narrator hears are similar in two aspects: All are multichorded—disharmonious—and all are "strange" intrusions into an otherwise peaceful, quiet, sentimental scene. The narrator marks their oddity by noting, on the one hand, his ignorance about the cause of the singing and emphasizing on the other the dislike the sound arouses in many people. The reader is prepared by these remarks to be wary of a crucial, and equally odd, aural event slightly later in the story.

For several pages, the narrator again drops all references to music, and returns to the subject obtrusively only at the significant point when a little grey female cat enters the story. This cat had disappeared, apparently into the woods behind the house, woods known as the habitation of wild tomcats, who "miaukaiut grubym, neobrabotannym golosom" (2:29), connecting them to the "strange" and "unpleasant" voices of the doors, the bees, and the carriage. The return of the house cat is noticed by Pul′kheria Ivanovna expressly because of a "zhalkoe miaukan′e." Apparently, her once-domesticated animal has learned the strange cacophonous "song" of a feral world. The cat's return after a proverbial three days only reinforces the reader's suspicion that Pul′kheria's pet has made a round trip to a wild world beyond our monotonous mortal one.

Pul′kheria interprets her cat's "resurrection" as a call to her own death and, no sooner said than done, dies. Her husband, Afanasii Ivanovich, eventually also heeds a call to death that is an intrusion into his quiet world of an eerie, otherwordly sound: the voice of the dead Pul′kheria calling his name.

The narrator at this point inserts a lengthy digression, the longest in the story, on these sounds from the netherworld, sounds he remembers hearing as a child, when "vsegda byl strashen etot tainstvennyi zov" (2:37). Most important for Gogol′'s aesthetic hierarchy, these calls arrive when *tishina byla mertvaia* into an *eta uzhasnaia tishina*. Sound, previously and repeatedly described in the story as music, is absent from this earthly world and, instead, intrudes from some superhuman realm, from *tot svet*. The narrator should—and does—feel thankful that he emerges with his life, since neither the heroine nor the hero do.

In the battle of the arts, the "pleasant" visual world of the story, with its faded pictures and picturesque wrinkles on the faces of the sentimental couple, succumbs to the mortally threatening, intrusive music of a world not only beyond the isolated estate, but outside the narrator's ken as well. The disturbing singing doors, like the passionate meows of the wild cats, signal the existence of such an uncanny world, for the disharmonious sound erupts from the margins of the enclosed world of the characters (windows, doors, the vehicle that takes Pul′kheria Ivanovna to the edge of her estate), intruding, as it were, from the beyond.

On a generic level, the uninvited cacophony barges in from the world of romantic as opposed to sentimental poetics. More profoundly, Gogol′ links his aesthetics to his metaphysics, foregrounding the stagnation of the landowners that is so easily penetrated by the music from beyond. The absence of music on the part of the inhabitants leaves a spiritual vacuum that threatens the very life of the *strarosvetskie pomeshchiki*.

Despite apparent differences in tone, "Vii," the third story of *Mirgorod*, ends with an identical terrifying silence and the subsequent intrusion of cacophonous forces from the world beyond. But "Vii" first misleads the reader into assuming that the world of the characters is not a vacuum but is in fact full of the very music absent in the lives of the picturesque landowners. The

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students introduced in the opening sequence talk in various registers, from treble to bass, and even their empty stomachs participate in the chorus with musical grumbling. Gogol' repeats the motif of orchestral music heard before from the doors and insects of the old-world estate, so that the multitonal, often discordant, quality of the students' interaction lends a (false) sense of vitality to the scene. Furthermore, the hero Khoma Brut seems able to harness the power of music in order to conquer his fear at being trapped in the chapel with the dead girl-witch: "[on] nachal chitat' samym gromkim golosom. ... Okinoko, bez ekha, sypalsia on gustym basom v sovershenno mertvoi tishine i kazalsia neskol'ko dikim dazhe samomu chtetsu" (2:207). Music appears to be a weapon from the character's earthly arsenal. Yet all is not right, and Khoma himself confesses that "Da u menia i golos ne takoi, i sam ia — chort znaet chto" (2:197).

Like the eerie song from beyond in "Starosvetskie pomeshchiki," Khoma's off-key attempt at music penetrates a terrifying silence in a story otherwise marked by its visual character, this time Gothic instead of sentimental. When Khoma first finds himself confronted with the corpse over which he is forced to chant the prayers for the dead, "glubokaia tishina votsarilas'" (2:199). On the first night, the chapel door is locked behind him. As Khoma looks around, his own and the narrator's sense of sight predominate, with references to the "liki sviatykh, sovershenno potemnevshie, [kotorye] gliadeli kak-to mrachno" (2:206) and to the girl, at whom Khoma cannot help looking and who stares back at him despite her closed eyes. The dead girl is described as a human statue. To regain control, Khoma tentatively begins chanting and, thus, inserts sound into what is called the "sovershenno mertvaia tishina" (2:207). The second night the stillness is *ugrozhaiushchaia* (2:210), and the third night *strashnaia* (2:216).

Khoma's chanting, however, ultimately cannot overcome the deadening silence surrounding him, for the music comes not from *tot svet,* but from this world. His poor voice only superficially resembles the powerful music praised in "Skul'ptura, zhivopis', i muzyka." A spiritual emptiness remains into which the powerful otherworldly sounds of the coffin crashing open, the wings of evil spirits, and the heavy footsteps of monsters ring out ominously.

Khoma has had a premonition: As the girl-witch rides him earlier in the story, the narrator asks, "Vidit li on eto ili ne vidit? Naiavu li eto ili snitsia? No tam chto? Veter ili muzyka: zvenit, zvenit i v"etsia, i podstupaet i vonzaetsia v dushu kakoiu-to nesterpimoiu terl'iu" (2:187). And as the otherworldly power "dies" under his beating, "Dikie vopli izdala ona; snachala byli oni serdity i ugrozhaiushchi, potom stanovilis' slabee, priiatnee, chishche, i potom uzhe tikho, edva zveneli, kak tonkie serebrianye kolokol'chiki" (2:187). Music from beyond the grave threatens even in its beauty. Thus, the enclosed world of the little church, and the haven created by the falsely comforting circle drawn around Khoma, are invaded from beyond even more ominously than was the bounded estate of the old-world landowners. "'Privedite Viia! stupaite za Viem!' razdalis' slova mertvetsa. I vdrug nastala tishina v tserkvi" (2:217).

Into a world gone silent the netherworld intrudes. As in "Starosvetskie pomeshchiki" vision takes over in the absence of sound. Khoma sees the chthonic gnome Vii, Vii sees Khoma, and our hero dies. The silence has been so profound that even the cock's first crow does not penetrate the church. Only on the second cock's crow does the earthly reassert itself, and the gnomes and monsters freeze in silent bas-relief in the doors and windows of the church. The everyday world of the characters returns to the visual, reflected in immobile sculpture.

Quite the opposite is true of the world of the heroes in the second story of *Mirgorod.* In "Taras Bul'ba," the Cossacks sing constantly. Singing is a persistent mark of their character, an indication of their vibrant lives. Khoma Brut and his fellow seminarians in "Vii" are also Cossacks, but Gogol' contrasts them to the "true" Cossacks of "Taras Bul'ba." Khoma is not a singer, he repeatedly tries to escape rather than fight, has little sense of Cossack fraternity with his fellow students, and, most condemning of all, entangles himself with a woman and a witch. A true Cossack takes only the saber as his wife. As Taras Bul'ba tells us about his actual wife and the mother of his sons: "Ona baba, ona nichego ne znaet. Kakaia vam nezhba? Vasha nezhba — chistoe pole da dobryi kon': vot vasha nezhba! A vidite vot etu sabliu? Vot vasha mater'!" (2:43).

The Cossacks who come to fetch Khoma for his vigil are "chelovek shest' zdorovykh i krepkikh kozakov, uzhe neskol'ko pozhilykh" (2:190), but, like Khoma himself, they only su-

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perficially resemble true fighting heroes, for they are now servants to a master other than the Sech′ and have dealings with females other than the traditional Cossack "fiancée," the open steppes. Their song is at best a weak echo of the resounding music of Taras Bul′ba.

In his book, *Poetika Gogolia,* Iurii Mann draws from Mikhail Bakhtin the idea that music and its companion, dance, are collective experiences, expressions of the wholeness and unity of the community. The Cossacks of "Taras Bul′ba," if nothing else, are whole and united. Mann disproves Bakhtin's assertion that the early stories by Gogol′ are carnivalesque by citing examples in which dance is an isolating, alienating experience, when it is a spectator, not a participatory, event.[10] His denial of the importance of carnival is convincing, but only for dance, not music, and Mann does not make this distinction. Dance is alienating in Gogol′ but only *without* music. The sorcerer in "Strashnaia mest′," Khoma in his drunken anxiety, and, in Mann's example, the drunk old women who dance like puppets at the end of "Sorochinskaia iarmarka" all ignore the powerful effects of the musical muse.

Music expresses the vigor and force of a spontaneous collective. Cossack exuberance comes from the multivoiced and even violent disharmony that Gogol′ raises to an ideal in his essay. The music in "Taras Bul′ba," however, is the least subtle of his uses of the arts, for it draws directly from folklore and had long since become a romantic staple when Gogol′ borrowed it. Lest the reader overlook music's special relation to vitality in "Taras Bul′ba," Gogol′ claims in the original, *Mirgorod* version of the story that, "tol′ko v odnoi muzyke est′ volia cheloveku. On v okovakh vezde" (2:300).

The revision of "Taras Bul′ba," published as a short novel in the 1842 collected works, connects music, power, and the ideal in a more integral manner. The Bul′ba men are first met at the Cossack camp, the Zaporozhian Sech′, by a crowd of musicians; the narrator tells us that "zemlia glukho gudela na vsiu okrugu, i v vozdukhe daleche otdavalis′ gopaki i tropaki, vybivaemye zvonkimi podkovami sapogov" (2:63). The Cossacks enjoy music in the same way they fight: merrily, exuberantly, and aggressively. Their whole story, we are told repeatedly in another romantic cliché, is fodder for bardic singers and bandore players. Their life is music itself.

Not only do the characters sing, but "Taras Bul′ba" also boasts an acutely tuned aural narrator. He hears music in the steppes, in the willows, in the snores of the horses, and in the great noisy feast that is the Cossack battle.

Painting and sculpture predominate in narrative descriptions of the enemy Polish characters; sight, not sound, is emphasized. At the execution of Bul′ba's older son, for example, the Poles gape and gaze, and one onlooker is described "na perednem plane," as though immobilized in a picture frame. As the Cossacks are the music itself, the Poles are their own picture, here epitomized by a pet falcon, trapped in a cage: "Sokol, visevshii v zolotoi kletke pod balkonom, byl takzhe zritelem: peregnuvshi na bok nos i podniavshi lapu, on, s svoei storony, rassmatrival takzhe vnimatel′no narod" (2:163). The Poles have become here the observers and the observed—static figures in the activity of life. Energetic aurality returns only for Cossack ears: "'Bat′ko! gde ty? Slyshish′ li ty?'," Ostap finally calls out. "'Slyshu!' razdalos′ sredi vseobshchei tishiny" (2:165).

The association of the Poles with sculpture condemns them even more, for with it the enemy moves backward in the hierarchy of the arts that was established by Gogol′. Coming out onto the ramparts of their besieged city, the Polish troops are described as a "zhivaia kartina," a *tableau vivant,* that would-be drama that bleeds from the stage both sound and movement and makes of people human statues. The Polish girl sculpts the love-struck Andrii Bul′ba; she immobilizes him with her beauty and literally robs him of sound: "On khotel by vygovorit′ vse, chto ni est′ na dushe, — i ne mog. Pochuvstvoval on chto-to zagradivshee emu usta: zvuk otnialsia u slova" (2:102). She, too, "na mig ostolbenev, kak prekrasnaia statuia, smotrela ona emu v ochi" (2:106). Even the Tartar woman who takes Andrii to the girl stood "podobno temnoi

10. Iurii Mann, *Poetika Gogolia* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1978), 14–22.

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granitnoi statue" (2:93). This stillness is the opposite of the ideal of life and power: Her eyes were "oderevenevshie, kak u mertvetsa."

The embedded arts of "Taras Bul′ba" yield readily to analysis, for the story divides neatly into black and white characters. Cossacks are good, so they sing; Poles, women, and Andrii, after he defects, are bad, so they are frozen into silent statues.[11] Despite the apparent simplicity of his symbolic use of the arts in this story, Gogol′ in fact adds a crucial complexity. While in "Starosvetskie pomeshchiki" cacophonous music has the power to intrude into the static, and essentially silent, lives of the characters and in "Vii" Khoma's song is at best bravura and ultimately impotent against both the static world around him and the threatening sounds of death, in "Taras Bul′ba" music is the mark of life and power of the Cossack themselves. Music exists not beyond, but within the characters. Gogol′ thus associates the Cossack essence with *tot svet,* and turns music from a terrifying and alien force to a life-affirming, organic one. Song, we might say, marks death in Gogol′ only when heard from the perspective of a silent and empty earthly world. If the world evoked in the plot is itself full of song, the world beyond does not intrude but, rather, coexists with this one. The Cossacks thus represent the possibility of infusing the power of the suprahuman into the human world.

Like *tot svet,* the world of the Cossacks is eternal, as their story is the stuff of song. Gogol′ suggests, in the inflated rhetoric of epic, that future generations will continue to sing of Taras and his comrades as the Greeks sing of the Achaians in the Trojan War (2:131–132):

> Не погибнет ни одно великодушное дело и не пропадет, как малая порошинка с ружейного дула, козацкая слава. Будет, будет бандурист, с седою по грудь бородою, а может, еще полный зрелого мужества, но белоголовый старец, вещий духом, и скажет он про них свое густое, могучее слово. И пойдет дыбом по всему свету о них слава, и всё, что ни народится потом, заговорит о них. Ибо далеко разносится могучее слово, будучи подобно гудящей колокольной меди, в которую много поверг нул мастер дорогого чистого серебра, чтобы далече по городам, лачугам, палатам и весям разносился красный звон, сзывая равно всех на святую молитву.

In this Homeric simile, painting and its silent, static world have no place. "Taras Bul′ba" is music, the story an epic lay, sung by a bard to the eternal joy of his audience.

Thus sculpture, painting, and music become in *Mirgorod* more than specimens in a prose experiment. Although the art embedded in these stories does serve to assert the supremacy of romantic prose—particularly in its nationalistic, "epic" manifestation—over the outdated sentimental and Gothic schools, they more profoundly witness a bitter conflict between mortality and eternity or between static beings who fear death and vibrant heroes who transcend death by fearing nothing at all.

The Cossack battle, played out in metaphors from the world of art, brings us to the seemingly anomalous last story of *Mirgorod:* "Povest′ o tom, kak possorilsia Ivan Ivanovich s Ivanom Nikiforovichem." Music in "Povest′ o tom" is neither terrifying nor grand but simply debased: Ivan Ivanovich sings in church with false religiosity; a fiddle squeaks in a scraggly puppet show, evoked in a simile about the first Ivan's lust for acquisition; and the incompetent judge relates how his songbird suddenly "nachal pet′ bog znaet chto" (2:245).

What are much more common are avowals, as were found in the assumed sentimentality of "Starosvetskie pomeshchiki," that painters could do a better job describing the scene than our narrator, that his pen is weak and his hand tired. (Nine such comments occur in "Povest′ o tom.") The narrator seeks to deny his oral-aural power and to abdicate it to one of the other arts. Again, as in the first story of *Mirgorod,* his modesty is a ruse. By pointing out his alleged lack of power, he actually reinforces it.

11. Yankel the Jew might also be mentioned in this context, but anti-Semitism is more banal than either xenophobia or misogyny in Gogol′. The author does not succeed in integrating negative descriptions of the Jews into his schema of the arts as well as he does those of women and Poles.

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Music participates if anything by its absence. At the end of the story, the people of Mirgorod arrange a meeting between the estranged Ivans. When the former friends see each other their faces turn to stone, and all present are immobilized into pictures (2:271):

> Присутствующие, все, сколько их не было за столом, онемели от внимания и не отрывали глаз от некоґда бывших друзей. Дамы, которые до тоґо времени были заняты довольно интересным разґором о том, каким образом делаются каплуны, вдруґ прервали разґовор. Всё стихло! Это была картина, достойная кисти великоґо художника!

This scene is more than familiar to readers of Gogol′. It anticipates the silent dumb show, the *tableau vivant* or *zhivaia kartina,* at the end of *Revizor.* It brings on the still tableau that briefly concludes "Koliaska," when the pompous droning of the general stops short at the sight of Chertokutskii compromised in his carriage. It is also the deathly silence before the appearance of Vii, or the *strashnaia tishina* on a cloudless day of "Starosvetskie pomeshchiki." All of these tableaux, markedly devoid of music or sound of any kind, herald the intrusion of powers from another world: the unspoken moral condemnation of *Revizor* and "Koliaska" or the fatal sounds from the netherworld of "Vii" and "Starosvetskie pomeshchiki."

The irony of "Povest′ o tom," which links it most clearly to the short stories that followed *Mirgorod,* is that the world stubbornly continues as is after the dumb show. "*Skuchno na etom svete, gospoda,*" admits the narrator (2:276). Silence sets the stage for the entrance of the other world into the human domain, yet people do not fight, do not exert their power, do not even try to sing. More so than Khoma, therefore, the two Ivans are the inverse of Taras Bul′ba. Their stagnation, described with metaphors drawn from painting and sculpture, has become permanent, and we are faced only with silence. Mirgorod's inhabitants and *Mirgorod*'s readers lose their vital connection to disharmonious music.

Gogol′ may have succeeded in *Mirgorod* with his experiment in the embedding of artistic media in prose texts, but he does not fare so well with his avowal of the possibility of the energetic integration of *this* world and *that.* The empty lives of his non-Cossack characters let in only the threatening and not the life-affirming elements of the awesome world beyond. Gogol′ faces this failure head-on in *Mertvye dushi,* the masterpiece that draws heavily on the philosophy as well as the characters and artistic devices developed in the earlier collection. Who is Korobochka but Pul′kheria Ivanovna, having missed even that musical call from beyond, surviving when her husband has died? Is not Nozdrev really Ivan Ivanovich, somewhat younger, but no less self-involved? Or does the later character descend from Khoma, deluding himself with false boundaries that make him no more important than Khoma's enchanted circle could make him safe. And Ivan Ivanovich may then have transmogrified into Manilov, remarried and stagnating in his own silent mediocrity.

Mertvye dushi too has "muses," and cacophonous music erupts occasionally from the jaws of Nozdrev's or Korobochka's dogs and at the bizarre ball that serves as backdrop to Chichikov's demise. All these examples are ridiculous parodies of the organic and life-giving music of the Cossacks, and no one but the reader, the narrator in his final troika, and occasional "homunculi" in digressions can escape the terrible silence of the town of N.[12] Even the frightening power of otherworldly Evil has deserted humanity's realm, now that the souls of the living are no better than dead. Void of the aggressive power of music, the earth is peopled with little more than animated statues, immobilized within the frames of living pictures.

12. Nabokov uses the term *homunculi* for the episodic characters Gogol′ creates and discards throughout *Mertvye dushi:* Vladimir Nabokov, *Nikolai Gogol* (New York: New Directions, 1944), 77. For an analysis of the potential of these lesser characters, along with the narrator, to transcend the stagnation of the plot, see Judith Deutsch, "Perspective from the Threshold: the Troika of *Dead Souls,*" *Ulbandus Review,* no. 5 (1987): 3–17.

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